THE SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF FAMILY VIOLENCE:

An Ethnography of Immigrant Experience In Vancouver

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A report to the Non-Medical Use of Drugs Directorate, Health and Welfare, Canada

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Feiffer

I GO TO A BAR. I TALK. EVERYBODY LISTENS.. I FEEL SMART.
UNTIL SOME FATHEAD DISAGREES WITH ME.
AND I CAN'T COME UP WITH AN ANSWER FOR HIM.
AND I FEEL DUMB.
I COME HOME, YOU SAY "HI!" I DON'T LIKE THE SOUND OF YOUR VOICE.
I PUT MY FIST IN YOUR MOUTH.
AND I'M ALL BETTER.
DON'T LEAVE ME, EMILY!

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August, 1978

ABSTRACT

This study examines the social organisation of wife battering among immigrant families in Vancouver. The focus is immigrant women's experience of being battered, and how this experience is located within the Canadian social and economic context. The data was gathered through participant observation and in-depth interviews both with ethnic workers dealing with immigrants in Vancouver and immigrant women. People from five ethnic groups were interviewed: Chinese, East Indian, Greek, Hungarian and Portuguese.

The conclusions reached by the researchers are as follows. We found the experience of immigrant women with different cultural backgrounds to be so similar that it is more meaningful to treat it as a whole, and not isolate it with respect to ethnic group. Certain unsubstantiated views are still prevalent in interpreting wife beating. These views are perpetuated in social agencies because the organisation of work affects what the social agency worker is able to see and interpret. It is our view that wife battering can only be seen as part of the dependency cycle women find themselves in as a result of their economic dependence on men. It should be emphasized that this dependency relationship of women and men in the family must be situated in the context of the larger society. While it is noted that alcohol enters into this cycle, it cannot be considered the cause of family violence. Rather it is the social aspect of alcohol consumption which needs to be examined in order to better understand the relationship between drinking and family violence.

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INTRODUCTION

This study is concerned with the social organisation of wife battering among immigrant families in Vancouver. Specifically, we wish to focus on immigrant women's experience of being battered, and how this experience is located within the Canadian social and economic context. There are two reasons for doing a study of this kind.

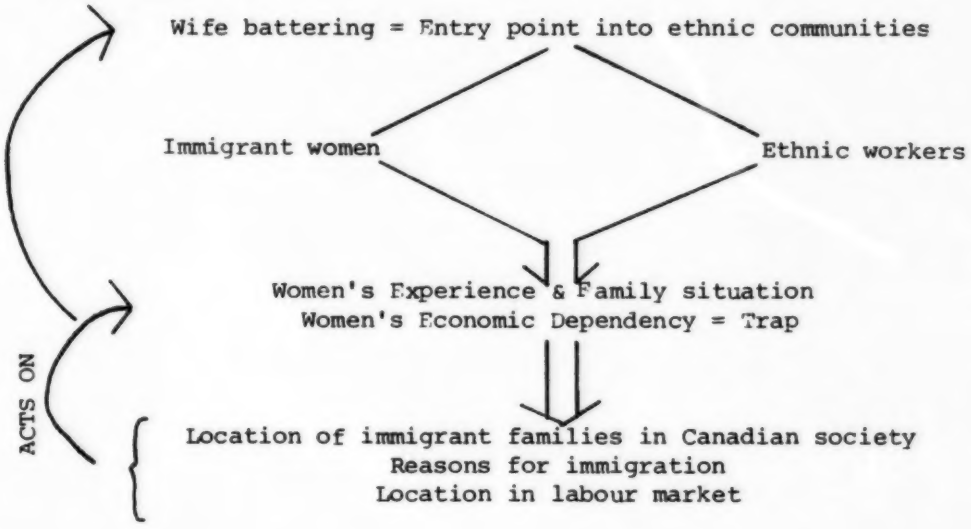
First, although family violence and wife battering have become a major social issue in the seventies as a result of Pizzey's work (Pizzey, 1974) in England and the efforts of women's groups in North America (e.g. Warrior, 1976; Gentzler, 1977; Currie and Gropper, 1976); very little work has been devoted to the situation of immigrant families. Considering the large and increasing immigrant population in B.C., particularly in Vancouver, and the current lack of information, this is an area of research which calls for immediate attention.

Secondly, we are extremely aware of, and concerned about, the invisibility of women's experience in conventional research (for a detailed discussion of womens' perspectives in research, see Jacobson, 1978). The following statement sums up our concern in this respect:

> *In conventional research, women, particularly working class and immigrant women, have largely been regarded as objects of study, and not subjects. As women, we have information about what we appear to be like through the eyes of others, but we have not put together our own accounts, beginning with our own experience, of what our lives are like....* (Ng and Sprout, 1978)*

Thus,in doing research on wife battering, we want to take immigrant women's experience as the starting point and see how it is situated in the larger society.

By using wife battering as the entry point to ethnic communities in Vancouver, we are able to discover the family situations of immigrants, and the way in which immigrant families are located and organised in Canada. This framework is congruent with our methodology, and provides us with a way of organising and interpreting the data. In a simplified form it looks like the following:


Wife battering = Entry point into ethnic communities
Immigrant women
Ethnic workers
Women's Experience & Family situation
Women's Economic Dependency = Trap
ACTS ON
Location of immigrant families in Canadian society
Reasons for immigration
Location in labour market

This is the framework we have used in organising the report.

* see D.E.Smith, 1978

In conducting the research, we have focused our inquiry on five immigrant groups; based on accessibility of informants and recommendations of workers in community organisations. These groups are: Chinese, East Indian, Greek, Hungarian, and Portuguese. However, in compiling the data we found their experience to be so similar and the cultural variables so insignificant, that it is more meaningful to treat immigrant women's experience as a whole, rather than isolate it with respect to ethnic grouping. We conclude that it is more important to view the particulars of immigrant women's experience in Canada as arising out of their immigration to an advanced capitalist society, and the way that immigrants are organised in terms of the labour force in that society; than to see their experience here as a "carry over" from their country of origin, or as a result of their ethnic background.

METHODOLOGY

This study has made use of the ethnographic method of inquiry; the research focuses on quality rather than quantity, data. Information gathering includes participant observation, and in-depth interviews with (1) ethnic workers dealing with immigrants in Vancouver, and (2) immigrant women.

As part of the participant observation method of investigation, we visited transition houses, emergency shelters for women, and women's groups, as well as attending conferences on family violence. We attended staff meetings of some community organisations, talked with individual staff members, and conducted discussions with other agency workers not included in the interview sample.

The snowball sampling technique was used to locate informants. We first made contact with individuals and organisations in different ethnic communities that we knew of. They put us in touch with other individuals and agency workers in the community. We then asked these people whether they were interested in participating in the research, and to help with identifying informants such as immigrant women, whom we could not otherwise contact. In this way, we were able to reach immigrant women from a variety of backgrounds, who may or may not make use of services provided by agencies.

Generally, formal organisations, especially transition houses and other emergency shelters, were more reluctant to put us in touch with immigrant women for reasons of confidentiality. In addition, women using transition houses are in crisis situations and may not want to be disturbed. "Informal organisations", such as local agencies, and women's centres were more willing to provide assistance in this respect. Most immigrant women that we interviewed were contacted either through this type of organisation or through personal contacts that the researchers established prior to the research.

We found this method of identifying informants worked well for this kind of research. We made use of interview schedules, rather than questionnaires, for the interviews. Having located the areas we wanted to explore (eg. immigration, work inside and outside the home, family relations, etc.), we asked questions that are relevant to women's everyday experience (eg. When and how did you come to Canada?, How do you do your housework?, Who do you currently live with? etc.). The interviews took between 1½ and 2½ hours. We were able to generate a large amount of data from these interviews. The interviewing process itself was highly satisfying because the researcher was able to establish direct and personal contact with the interviewee.

We interviewed eleven ethnic workers and eleven immigrant women from five communities: Chinese, East Indian, Greek, Hungarian, and Portugese. All interviews with workers were conducted in English. In the case of immigrant women, the researcher sometimes

had to work through an interpreter (usually an agency worker who knew the woman), or conduct the interview in the native language of the interviewee. Some immigrant women, who have been in Canada for a long time, were able to communicate in English. In this case, no interpreter was required.

In doing this research, we define immigran women as those women who are considered "immigrants" by workers, other people, and themselves. Even though they may have lived in Canada for a long time, they are still seen as "immigrants" because of language and other barriers. Some of these women may legally be Canadian citizens. It is remarkable that their experience of family violence does not seem to differ greatly according to their length of residency in Canada.

Two methods were used to record the interviews. Where possible (without objection from the informant), the interview was taped and transcribed later. Where taping was not possible, notes were taken during the interview and then transcribed afterwards. Both methods have their advantages and shortcomings. Transcribing interviews is a time consuming process, but it offers a much more accurate account. Note taking is less time consuming, but unless the notes are transcribed right away, the researcher may not remember the details of the interview. We found that we were not able to transcribe some interviews immediately because of the time limitation. In addition to the transcript of the interview, the researchers took notes, such as

impressions, and other comments. This was helpful in ensuring that the same mistakes were not duplicated. It also serves as a check on the interviewing process.

In closing, we want to emphasise that this study is exploratory in nature. Because of the limitations of time and funding, we were able to carry out only a small number of interviews. We found the ethnographic method extremely useful in providing a descriptive account of immigrant women's experience. However, we propose that more work has to be done before a representative picture of their experience can be produced.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Family Violence: The Worker's View

From the interviews conducted with workers in social service agencies dealing with immigrants, we found that there are some commonly held views surrounding wife beating. Some of these views have more validity than others; but generally they tend to offer an incomplete picture. (This is further elaborated in the section entitled; What Does Research Show?) The views outlined below emerged most frequently in our data.

One of the most commonly held views about family violence is that it occurs primarily among working class or uneducated people. Most workers tend to think that there is less wife beating among middle class and professional families.

Here are some examples:

> *In one interview, the worker cited education as the main reason for family disputes to arise:*
> .....
> *(The worker) commented that she kept crying "just for one slap". .....She felt that the reason for her to get upset is because she is uneducated....*
>
> *(The worker) felt that her problem is not really big enough to constitute a divorce. Since she is uneducated, every little problem becomes enormous to her. She does not understand and the husband doesn't see he should help, because he is uneducated as well.*
> *(Chinese Worker, p.4)*
> **********

(Wife beating) happens mainly in the "lower community" (she meant lower class). They beat their wives, especially when they get drunk.
.....
Middle and upper class people are much better. They don't drink as much and they don't beat their wives.
(Portuguese Worker, p.6)
****

(Wife beating occurs) especially in the lower classes, ... they go out and work, men and women, especially in the cities, because the situations all over the world are depressing. They don't have enough money to support their families. They are poor. They go out and drink with friends and then they go back home and the women have problems.
(Greek Worker, p.4)
****

(It) was my fault (that I was beaten) for marrying a worker. Now, this (wife beating) is not done by the middle class people, this is mostly by the lower class people.
(Hungarian Worker, p.]0)

The process of immigration is frequently cited as the only cause of family violence, because of the general social and economic difficulties that immigrants face, and the resulting pressure placed on the family:

I tend to think that battering or family frustrations occur from social and economic difficulties, and the problems of the outside tend to be channelled through the family unit, and one takes these frustrations out on somebody else.
(Greek Worker, p.9)
****

(The Worker said) adjustment problems relate to all kinds of family problems.
When asked if this is common to people of all social and economic background, she replied:
Not to that extent among the well educated. The well educated, at least they can manage on their own to some extent, because they have no language problem.....
(East Indian Worker, p.22)
****

> *(The worker) told me that Portuguese men worked very hard. They got nervous because of the immigration experience. They came here expecting to find a better life. But life was not as they expected here. Although they made more money, the cost of living was higher. They always ran into financial difficulty, no matter how hard they tried. This is the main reason for beating up their wives.*
> *(Portuguses Worker, p.4)*

Another view is that the woman, in some way, provokes the beating; as one worker commented, "women nag too much":

> *(The worker) thinks that women generally nag too much. She does it herself sometimes. She understands how annoying it is to men when women nag too much. Sure, sometimes a man is so provoked that he slaps her. It's understandable. She can see how if a person is really mad, she or he will slap someone.... She feels that it is not right to blame it all on the man.*
> *(Chinese Worker, p.]])*

Some workers feel that women generally have too much freedom in Canada, such freedom threatens the family unit and may set a precedent for women to leave their husbands if they are beaten, or if things don't work out:

> *(The worker) felt that the problem here was that women got too much freedom. If they weren't getting along with their husbands they could apply for welfare or something. The women knew they would not starve.*
> *(Portuguese Worker, p.5)*

What Does Research Show?

In reviewing some of the literature on family violence, we found that the worker's views were not always substantiated. Although much more work needs to be done in this area, we have accumulated a body of knowledge about family violence, which points to inaccuracies in some of these commonly held views. Below we examine some of the facts that research has uncovered.

While wife beating has been a common occurrence throughout history, it had not been considered a topic worthy of inquiry until the opening of the Chiswick House in England. Pizzey's book (1974), "Scream Quietly Or The Neighbours Will Hear", has drawn much attention to the subject of wife battering. Since then, more and more women have come out of the closet with accounts of their experience of being battered, and many studies and research have been done on wife battering and family violence, both in the U.S. and Canada (eg. Martin, 1976; Langley and Levy, 1977; Downey and Howell, 1976; Riddington, 1977).

The view that family violence is primarily a lower or working class phenomenon has been disputed. Recent research shows that wife beating is a cross class phenomenon. Women get beaten, men batter their wives, regardless of their socio-economic status and class background. Women who come to Chiswick House, as well as transition houses in British Columbia, come from a variety of educational, ethnic, and class backgrounds. Martin's research (1976) on battered women in the U.S. also points to the cross class character of wife battering. As Downey and Howell note:

> *.....the idea that domestic violence is essentially a lower class phenomenon is an over-simplification of the problem, and more likely reflects the greater visibility of lower class violence where 'private' modes of violence management through doctor, priest, and other professionals are not available and where the opportunities and capabilities for hiding and explaining away injuries are fewer.*
> *(Downey and Howell, 1976:24)*

While it is sometimes assumed that the frustration of unemployment and economic hard times are causes of wife battering, it has been discovered that even men at the top of the economic structure, or from upper income groups, are also known to beat their wives (Martin,1976). Social service agency statistics may show a class bias, because lower income people are more likely to use social service agencies. The statistics of these agencies are most accessible to researchers and social scientists (ibid).

In sum, it has been established that wife beating occurs in every class, religion, and ethnic group. It happens in what we might consider "normal" families, and therefore we can say that wife beating is not perpetuated by only "sick" men.

Our findings confirm most of the facts we already know about the phenomenon of wife battering. It is a very widespread problem that occurs in every ethnic group that we investigated. For example, one agency that deals primarily with East Indian immigrants, reveals that most of the cases relate to family problems in one way or another, and 90% of the family counselling cases involve wife beating. Similarly in the Hungarian community, 89% of the cases that have to do with family or marriage counselling cases,

involve family violence. A Chinese worker told us that she doesn't normally have many marriage counselling cases, but out of all the ones that she has dealt with since she started working in her agency in January, there was only one case where wife beating did not occur. Below is a list of statistics released by one social service agency that provides services for immigrant groups in Vancouver. It should be noted that these are conservative estimates.

FAMILY VIOLENCE STATISTICS - JANUARY THROUGH JULY, 1978

The table shows the number of recorded cases involving:

Community	Family Problems	Actual or Threatened Physical Violence	# of Separate Requests for Assistance
Spanish	19	9	62
Hindi/Punjabi	60	30	176
Hungarian/ German		11	119
Portuguese*	9	2	
Chinese	15	10	70
Serbo-Croation (Yugoslavian)	11	8	70

We realise that actual statistics of wife battering are extremely difficult to obtain. Due to the nature of the problem and the recording system of most service agencies, it is difficult to find out whether wife beating occurs (see Downey and Howell,1976).

* Statistics not confirmed

However, the high number of incidences of wife battering cases we came across in most agencies we contacted, indicates that it is indeed very widespread.

Our data also reveals that wife battering happens in all social classes, although it is true that most people who go to social service agencies belong to the working class. While one worker explained that wife beating occurs primarily among uneducated people, she contradicted herself by saying that she thought it occurred across class, *"but middle class women are less likely to make it public" (Chinese Worker, p.]]).* An East Indian worker also admits that her clients come from all class backgrounds, including very well educated professionals. Transition houses confirmed the fact that battered women come from all stratas of society.

The immigration process often results in isolation for immigrants, the usual support mechanisms in the community are not available. They may experience language difficulties, or be unable to find a job; as a consequence the traditional roles of men and women in the home may be threatened, all of which combine to make them less secure and more vulnerable. However, while the immigration process and difficulties of acculturation may exacerbate the family situation, it does not constitute the root cause of family violence; as one worker felt concerned to point out:

> *With regard to wife beating, it should be remembered that this is not something that people develop when they come here. They do it back home as well. Some men are very strict with their wives. It has nothing to do with immigration.*
> *(East Indian Worker, p.4)*

Nor is it confined to one ethnic group. In all the ethnic groups we investigated, the workers admit that men are known to beat their wives. Cultural variables seem to have very little to do with family violence, it is a common phenomenon and an accepted behaviour of men, although not always blatantly so, in every culture.

In order to understand why it is that these partial views about family violence form an important part of people's beliefs, we have to turn to an examination of the worker's work place, and the invisibility of the woman's position in the family and in society as a whole.

The Organisation of Social Service Agencies

Our study indicates that the worker often has only a partial view of the immigrant woman's situation. The data provides the beginnings of an account of why this is. An examination of the work place could bring to light how certain aspects of immigrant women's lives become invisible to them. In fact the workers themselves articulate some of these problems. However it is an area that requires further research.

The workers that we interviewed, with the exception of three workers, are from non-governmental local agencies which service the immigrant community in Vancouver. The major function of these agencies is interpretation and information giving. That is, they mediate between government agencies and a population which cannot otherwise be articulated to the formal service delivery system, because of the language barrier.

People who come to local agencies are primarily non-English speaking immigrants from working class background. All the workers told us that most of their clients have menial, unskilled, or semi-skilled jobs; they work as construction labourers, janitors, farm workers, kitchen help, nurses aids, chambermaids, or household domestics. In other words, they occupy jobs that belong to the lower echelon of the labour force. Middle class people do not come to local agencies because they can make use of other resources. As one worker very aptly puts it:

> *....only people from lower economic and social strata came to (the worker), because they did not have the money or language or education to seek other help. Middle class people would go to a lawyer right away. If anything happened to her, she said, for sure she would go to a lawyer.*
> *(Chinese Worker, p.]0)*

Thus, the majority of the people that the worker comes into contact with are from working class background. Problems of middle class families do not display themselves in the same way to agency workers.

In the course of the research, we discovered that most agencies are not set up and do not deal with wife battering. Those agencies which do offer some family counselling, find that information giving and interpretation form 90% of the services they perform. Generally, workers in these agencies have heavy case loads and find that family counselling is extremely time consuming. As well, there is often very little in the way of advice that a worker can offer to alleviate the situation for a woman who is being battered (see section on Economic Dependence).

The table on page 13 gives the number of times requests are made for family counselling. However statistics on family violence are often conservative because its occurrence is frequently only discovered in the course of dealing with another problem. As one worker says, women come to the agency for assistance with other services, such as welfare, which may originate from family problems. The case is then recorded as a welfare case. Unless the woman complains directly about

family violence, there is no way of discovering what happens to her. Many women may come in for counselling, but unless a woman is prepared to leave her husband, she is usually unwilling to disclose the fact that she has been beaten (Field notes, East Indian Worker). Most family violence cases do, in fact go unnoticed. This would account for the relatively low proportion of cases in agency records, compared to the actual occurrence of wife beating.

Thus, the problems that women face, particularly in family violence situations, cannot be readily incorporated into the services provided by most agencies. Until the establishment of transition houses, there was nowhere that could adequately cope with the "problem" of wife battering.

This is not meant to be a criticism of workers, or local agencies, but rather to begin to point out why it is that family violence often remains invisible as a social problem, precisely because of a social organisation of agencies, which innocently prevents the surfacing of the "facts".

Economic Dependency as a Trap for Women

We interviewed both immigrant women who have been battered and those who have not actually experienced physical abuse. Regardless of whether physical violence occurred in the family, we found their situations to be remarkably similar. For the purpose of this report, therefore, it is more important not to focus on the actual physical violence that a woman might experience, but rather to view her situation within the context of the woman's economic dependence on her husband. Whether she is battered or not, an immigrant woman finds herself in a trap in Canada as a result of this dependency. When we reviewed the statistics provided by one agency, we found that even though some women who came for help had not been beaten, their situations were so deplorable that they wanted to leave their husbands. This will be more visible from the excerpts of interviews quoted below.

From the data, we conclude that it is only through understanding their economic dependency that we can make sense of the similar situations that immigrant women find themselves in. In all but one family, the husband is the main breadwinner and controls the finances of the household:

> *He doesn't spend money on his own family at all, but used to send all the money back to India. There is no housekeeping money for her. Now, after the agency's intervention, she gets the family allowance money. Before, he used to take all the money.*
> *(Field notes, East Indian Woman)*
> **********

Yeah, and sometimes my husband gives me some (money) but not too much, because just my husband works and there are lots of bills to pay. The money is not enough to give me.
(Portuguese Woman, p.5)

Even when the woman works, she usually hands her earnings to her husband, and he decides how the money is to be spent:

The husband owns everything, even by the best marriages. If they both work, the husband and the wife, the husband pays the mortgages, the car and pays for the furniture, and these go in his name. The household, the grocery is paid always by the woman. After 12 years, or 10 years of marriage, the woman has nothing to show.
(Hungarian Worker, p.5)
****

The woman works very hard and gives the money to the husband. I don't know, I can't explain it very good, but the woman in Portugal is nothing. Very, very low.
(Portuguese Woman, p.10)

We found that a surprising number of immigrant women don't even get housekeeping money from their husbands. In these cases, the husband goes shopping with the wife and pays for the groceries so that the woman does not learn how to handle Canadian money, even though she has been in Canada for a long time:

She does shopping with her husband. ....her husband handles all the money. She gets no money atall. Usually she decides on what to get, and the quantity, and her husband pays. She does not handle money.
(Field notes, East Indian Woman)
****

When you go shopping, how do you handle the money? Do you get money from your husband to do shopping, or does he handle the money?

No, my husband pays.
(Portuguese Woman, p.4)

Most immigrant women we talked to find it difficult to run the household smoothly because they do not get enough money from their husbands. Most working class immigrants barely make enough money to cover all their expenses in Canada. However, the man, being the money earner, can at least keep a certain amount for his own use, such as saving drinking money for himself and his buddies. The woman has to make do with whatever she receives from her husband.

> *My husband sometimes doesn't get job. It's very hard because my husband bought my house and things for the house, after the baby was born. My husband thought I could go to work.... to help my husband about the money. But I have health problems, so I can't. And I had a hard time in this country too. Some friends would come in and bring some fruit, fruit in cans, you know. It's very hard because I had no money to eat and have three children. I cannot help my husband. My husband did not get a job. He doesn't work everyday because he is a longshoreman and he has to go to the hall everyday. Sometimes he finds job, sometimes not.*
>
> .....
>
> *Sometimes he gives me but sometimes the money is not enough. It is very hard to give me some money to buy something for me, some clothes for me and for my children, but I use my children's government cheques.*
> *(Portuguese Woman, p.4)*
> **********
>
> *Since they came to Canada, her husband has been making money. However, he would not hand any money over to her. She has no housekeeping money. All her savings have been spent and she is worried about her financial situation.*
> *(Field notes, Chinese Worker)*

Another worker tells of a complaint by an elderly woman about her daughter's family:

She was sponsored by her daughter. ....The daughter and the son-in-law didn't get along. There was no battering, but they quarrelled often. The son-in-law drank a lot; he gambled; etc. So the house was always short of money. When there was not enough money for the daughter, they fought.
(Field notes, Portuguese Worker)

Within this relationship, the man is the "boss" by virtue of his economic power. The wife, on the other hand, is in a completely subordinate position because of her economic dependency. She has no real power in the family. She cannot leave her husband because she is dependent on him for financial security. Her only recourse, within this situation, is to complain, to "nag". Indeed, in most family disputes, money is the most important factor. A Chinese worker mentions that one similarity amongst all the women who go to her for family problems, is their complaint about the lack of money:

We went through all the cases she told me, and sure enough, they are all related to the woman complaining about the lack of money in one way or another.
(Field notes, Chinese Worker)

We asked an immigrant woman who has not been battered herself, whether she knew of any family disputes in her neighbourhood:

Since you live in a Chinese neighbourhood, do you know if there are family disputes among Chinese people here?

Very common. A lot.... The main thing is the question of economics Some of the husbands don't want their wives to work, but if the wife does not work, their lives are more difficult in Canada.

.....
If only one person works, life gets very difficult and there are lots of disputes. That's what I discovered.
(Chinese Woman, p.12)

A woman does try, from time to time, to exert her rights in the home by "nagging". However, her power is false. Since her husband controls the purse string and thereby her livlihood, she is powerless in this relationship. Within this context, we may interpret wife beating as a way for the man to reassert his power in the household - "let her know who's boss". As was referred to earlier, (see quote from Chinese Worker on p.10), some workers feel that the wife is partly responsible, in that she may nag him too much, therefore provoking him to the point of physical violence.

Divorce is not a viable alternative for most immigrant women. This is not simply because of their economic reliance on the husband's income. Divorce is not an accepted norm in most cultures. When there is a family breakdown, the woman is somehow held responsible for it, and she is ostracized by his and her own families, as well as the larger community:

A woman who gets battered by her husband would not talk to anybody, because it is to do with family prestige. She wouldn't talk to anyone unless she wants to separate. There is little divorce or separation. Only when there is no way out, would they accept separation or divorce as a means of resolving problems.
(Field notes, East Indian Worker)
****

Divorced women are not accepted, really, although people would not stop talking to them. But people talk behind their backs. Since everyone knows one another in the community, they talk a lot.
(Field notes, Portuguese Worker)
****

Their children cannot go into the Hungarian school. O.K., on paper they can go, but: "Oh, I'm so sorry, honey, but we don't have place today. Please come back next week". And after 3 or 4 Saturdays they never go back. The divorced woman sits mostly not in the middle of the church, but in the last three rows. And they come to you, everybody on the street, and tell you: "You are a bad woman; you left your husband".....
(Hungarian Worker, p.5)

Thus, immigrant women find themselves in a trap. They cannot leave their home situations because of their financial insecurity, and cultural norms. As was mentioned earlier, there are very few resources in the larger society for battered women. Women in these circumstances, in effect, have no recourse. This is by no means peculiar to immigrant women, but is a widespread pattern for battered women in general (see Errington,1978). However the experience of immigrant women is made worse by the cultural and language barriers, and the whole immigration process.

Alcohol and Wife Battering

The data from our research reveals that alcohol consumption is associated with most family violence situations. Most wife batterers were either drunk, or had been drinking prior to beating their wives. In one agency, we were informed that among all the wife beating cases, there were only three or four (about 10%), where alcohol was not involved. Most workers we talked to, however, stressed that drinking is not the cause of wife beating. Our data indicates that alcohol consumption only serves to release the man's inhibitions; this compares favourably with information we already know about alcohol related violence (eg. Gault, 1978). The frustration is already there. Alcohol provides an "excuse" for the man to beat his wife - "when they are drunk, they don't know what they are doing". This myth is so persuasive that most women tend to believe in it:

> *I asked if the woman would leave (when she is badly beaten). The worker said not really. Since most men beat their wives when they are drunk, the wife may think, "well, when he is sober, he is O.K.". So she forgives him.*
> *(Field notes, Portuguese Worker)*

For the purpose of this report, we find it more meaningful to locate alcohol within the sequence of the dependency cycle previously mentioned. What we want to draw attention to, is the social aspect of drinking and its relationship to family violence.

Although our data regarding drinking patterns among men is by no means conclusive, we want to look at the following facts:

- men tend to beat their wives when they are drunk, or have been drinking.
- with the exception of alcoholics, men tend not to drink alone. They usually drink with their friends - their drinking "buddies".
- most family violence situations tend to occur when the man returns from these drinking "parties", so to speak.

Here are some examples:

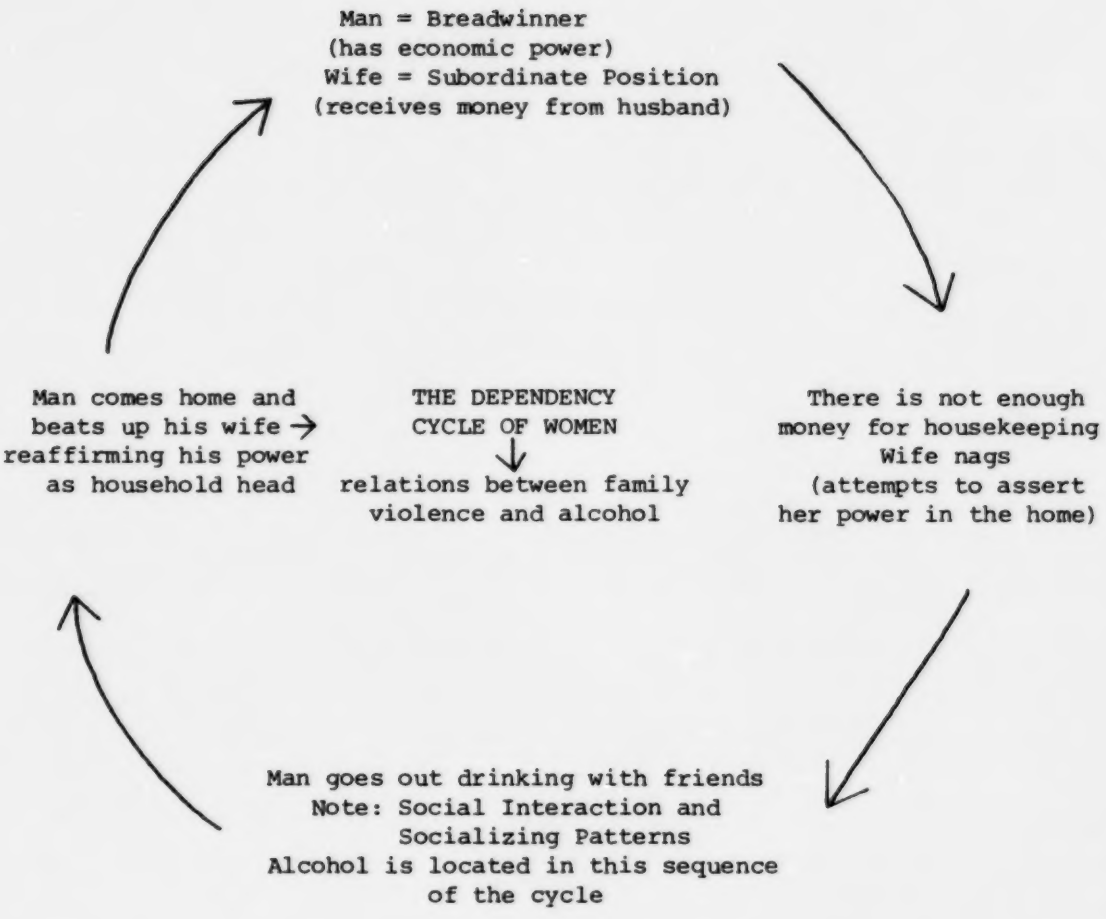
> *My husband goes out all the time with my brother to the beer parlour, and drinks a lot. He comes in the morning and would go to work and come back from work, and go to the beer parlour again.....*
> *(Portuguese Woman, p.2)*
> **********
>
> *He may drink with his friends at home in the weekend, then wake her up to cook or serve them, or something. If she complains, he may slap her around. If there are women present, this is not likely to happen.*
> *(Field notes, East Indian Worker)*

One East Indian woman complains that her husband never takes her out to "weddings", which he attends quite often. She is upset because weddings are usually family affairs that the whole family goes to. When the worker asked him, he replied that the "weddings" he goes to are not "proper for women".

What is important is not whether the husband, in fact, goes to "weddings", but that this type of social gathering, which may involve alcohol consumption, is a rather widespread phenomenon among men from all ethnic backgrounds. What would be interesting to investigate is the kind of social interaction and the socialization process that takes place in these gatherings. We speculate that, what may be significant, is the support and encouragement that men give each other in reaffirming their role as breadwinner and boss. This may partially explain the fact that women get beaten up more readily after their husbands return from such drinking gatherings.

We must hasten to add, that this is an area of research that has not been thoroughly investigated. We suggest it is a field which requires more attention. It may make visible some of the social factors related to drinking and family violence.

Alcohol can now be located within the dependency cycle of wife battering, outlined earlier. A diagrammatic form of this cycle follows. It should be pointed out that the diagram is an abstract form of the cycle, which may not correspond exactly to every instance of wife battering. It merely serves as a framework within which we can begin to view family violence, not as a separate social problem, but one that is clearly located in a societal context.


Man = Breadwinner
(has economic power)
Wife = Subordinate Position
(receives money from husband)
There is not enough money for housekeeping
Wife nags
(attempts to assert her power in the home)
Man goes out drinking with friends
Note: Social Interaction and Socializing Patterns
Alcohol is located in this sequence of the cycle
Man comes home and beats up his wife
reaffirming his power as household head
THE DEPENDENCY CYCLE OF WOMEN
relations between family violence and alcohol

The Social Relations of Immigrant Families

In the previous sections, we have shown how the situation of immigrant women and wife battering are located within a specific relation of men and women in the family. In this section, we want to draw attention to the relationship between the immigrant family and the larger society. We maintain that the kind of dependency relationship we described in the family, can only be understood in a specific societal context, which relates to a particular mode of production (for a theoretical discussion of this, see Smith, 1973).

First of all, let us examine the reasons for immigrants coming to Canada. Most immigrants come to Canada in search of a better standard of living and economic position.

> *The basic reason for their arrival in Canada, or the basic reason for leaving Greece, is the financial situation they are faced with. You see, they come from small villages, and the different government policies were not to encourage the development of out of city life. Farmers tended to lose their land.... so they were forced to leave their land and go to Athens for a better life, which they never found. So some of them would go back to the village and others wouldn't like to go back, feeling like failures, then they would choose the road to immigration.*
> *(Greek Worker, p.2)*
> **********

> *But if they don't speak English and so on, why do they come?*
>
> *Well, a very glamorous picture has been painted in India, of Canada as a land of milk and honey..... Then the relatives who go, tell that they are living in such a luxurious way. Just imagine a guy living in a village, who can't dream of a car, who can't dream of a fridge, and dishwasher, and all those things. ....Once they hear that Canada is a nice country, they certainly want to come to Canada.*
> *(East Indian Worker, p.4)*
> **********

.....But at that time, when I left, it was very hard. My husband was in the army. I had my little girl, just one and I was pregnant. Nobody to help me. I wrote my brother and told him my husband is finished, and my brother wrote saying that I should come to this country, to a better way of life.
(Portuguese Woman, p.4)

However, once they are in Canada, immigrants find that, although the standard of living is higher, the cost of living is also high. The majority of immigrants come to fill the lower strata of the labour market. They provide Canada with a cheap labour force. Most find because of the language barrier discrimation , they are stuck with low-paying, menial, and unskilled jobs in restaurants, factories, and janitorial companies.

Jobs for new immigrants are a big problem. It does not matter whether you are poor or well educated. When you come here, people ask for Canadian experience, and you don't have it. For the educated people, usually they take short courses to upgrade their skills. .....The uneducated ones work as dishwashers and so on in kitchens.
(Field notes, East Indian Worker)

A Chinese woman, who had a position as a draughtsperson in Hong Kong and is now working as a candy wrapper in a candy factory, puts it this way:

I feel that well educated Chinese people are not able to make use of their knowledge in a foreign country. They have to work in positions below their ability. The main thing is English.
(Chinese Woman, p.]])

Economic difficulty is very real for immigrant families. As we mentioned before, most immigrant women complain about the lack

of money. With mortgages and bills to pay, they find that there just isn't enough money to go round. A lot of frustrations are created in the immigration process. More importantly, men have to depend on the services of their wives. The wife is responsible for organising and maintaining the household, and all the other factors involved in ensuring the smooth running of the home. Her services are an essential part of the unpaid labour that a man must get,in order to maintain himself and his family, in a corporate capitalist society such as the one we have in Canada (for a detailed discussion, see Smith, 1973).

Thus it is in the man's interest to maintain his wife's dependency, in order to obtain her services. One of the most striking facts we discovered about immigrant women is their complete isolation, not only from the larger society, but also from their own friends and relatives:

> *I, I.....don't go shopping very often. When I go shopping, I do it very fast and then go straight home. Therefore I don't have a lot of friends. When I lived on 28th. St., all I saw were the landlady and the neighbours, who were also Chinese.... (Chinese Woman, p.]0)*

Most immigrant women we interviewed said they either don't know many people, or they have very few friends. It is also striking that the husband actively seeks to maintain his wife's isolation, thereby asserting his exclusive rights over her.

I was living in my husband's home..... We had before many troubles, many fights. He several times hit me, but this time I was just going to the corner to mail some letters back to Hungary, and I met with an English speaking lady. I don't speak English. We cannot make a conversation. I was just telling her I don't speak English, and this was the time when my husband just came home with his working truck. And he saw me speaking with somebody. When he went back to the house, he beat me very hard.
.....
He was telling me he didn't want me to speak to anybody. Everybody is stupid. He doesn't want me to speak to somebody. By my husband's explanation, every woman is a whore and every man is just a whore catcher and stupid. This was the only explanation that he gave me.
(Hungarian Woman, p.2)
****

....he wouldn't let her see her own brother, who is here in Vancouver, very often. He doesn't like it if she was too close to her own family.
.....
When I asked her whether she belonged to any club or organisations, she said no, she didn't belong to any club. She laughed, "I am a member of this household". She has little or no social activities with friends. Her husband gets upset if she socialises with other women.....
(East Indian Woman, p.7)

As soon as this dependency relationship is violated, men get very threatened and would go to extremes, such as wife beating, to assert and maintain their rights. One worker puts it this way:

.....women have to play double roles. They have to work outside 8 hours, as the men do; when they come home, they have to look after the children, they have to cook, they have to do everything. So it becomes too much. If she says anything or if she expects her husband to help in the household, then it becomes an issue of conflict.

Sometimes she does expect her husband to help?

Yes, or maybe if she feels too tired, naturally she complains. Some men think that it is their privilege to go out and work. They would prefer the wives to stay home and just do their household work, because when they go out to work, they feel more self-sufficient, they gain confidence, and they feel independent, and it is very threatening to men. .....That is why they are not in favour of sending their women to work.
(East Indian Worker, p.8)

It is only within this context that we can understand the kinds of conflict that immigrant people face. It is also within this context that we can locate the phenomenon of wife battering, it must be viewed as something arising from the kind of society that we live in.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this report, we have dealt with the phenomenon of wife battering among immigrant families in Vancouver, by interviewing both workers who work with immigrants as well as immigrant women themselves. We have found that certain unsubstantiated views are still prevalent in interpreting wife battering. We have shown how these views persist in the work place, by pointing out how the organisation of the worker's work affects what the worker is able to see and interpret.

We put forward a framework for viewing wife beating as part of the dependency cycle that women find themselves in - a trap from which they cannot escape precisely because of their economic dependence upon men. We attempt to locate the use of alcohol within this cycle, drawing attention to the fact that no research has been initiated in this area. We suggest that future research, focusing on the social aspect of alcohol consumption and the "buddy patterns", would be invaluable in uncovering the relationship between drinking and family violence.

We demonstrate the importance of not isolating the experience of immigrant families, but to situate it within the larger societal context of a corporate capitalist society, such as the one we have in Canada. We maintain that it is only in such a context we can understand why wife battering occurs.

Finally, we want to emphasise the exploratory nature of this study. We have, perhaps, raised more questions than we can readily answer from the data available to us. However, we feel the whole area of the immigration process, and the relationship of immigrant families to the larger society have to be examined in more depth. It is only within the dependency cycle that we can begin to understand why it is that wife battering occurs, and how we can do away with it.

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